Why did Ambedkar choose Buddhism to liberate his Depressed Classes? Was his failure in politics leading him to Buddhism?

In this paper, I am going to write about Ambedkar's early life and social and political activities, including: his childhood and education; reasons of his fight for equal rights; his involvement in politics; his advocacy for the right of the untouchable people; his idea of democracy; and his frustration in politics. Afterwards, I will discuss about how he looked for a religious solution to help the untouchable people through: his definition of religion; his thoughts about the problem of inequality in religion; his proposal for true religion; his view of contemporary religions in India, including: his view of Hinduism;[1] his view of Christianity; his view of Islam; his view of Sikhism; and his view of Communism.[2] Next, I will discuss his path to Buddhism, including: his view of Buddhism; his previous and contemporary people that followed the Buddhist path, his encounter with this tradition; and his Buddhist resources and exposure to Buddhism. After a long period of filtering all the choices, he came to consider two options: Buddhism and Marxism. Finally, he chose Buddhism for reasons such as its virtues in equality, its advocacy for women's rights, its indigenous religion of India, its rejection of both God and soul, and his passion with the Buddha's personal image. After several years of careful consideration, he eventually was converted voluntarily to Buddhism. Certainly, I will discuss which form of Buddhism he followed, his contribution to Indian Buddhism, including: his writings and views about Buddhism through the reconstruction of Buddhist philosophies of Karma, Four Noble Truths, morality, and so forth. I will discuss others' critics on his Buddhist

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[1] They include: his finding about the underpinning of inequality through the *Law of Manu*; his thought about the problem of inequality in Hinduism; his refutation to Hinduism; his thought about the problem of untouchability; his postulation of Broken Men as previous Buddhists; his act of burning the *Law of Manu*; and the effect of his rejection of Hinduism and the offerings from the other traditions to him.

[2] They include his thought, his collaboration, and his rejection of its approach.

approach. Next, I will talk about his Buddhist influence and transformation on the untouchable people. Lastly, after a thorough analysis, I will conclude that he converted to Buddhism because of his failure and frustration with politics in finding a way to uplift the life of the untouchable people.

Chapter One. His early life and social and political activities

A. Introduction

Why did Ambedkar choose Buddhism to liberate his Depressed Classes? Was his failure in politics leading him to Buddhism? There are many reasons behind his decision to choose Buddhism as his religion and that of his Depressed Classes. Let us discuss his life.

While Gandhi was a social reformer, Ambedkar (1891–1956) was a social revolutionist, a political leader, an original sociologist, and a Buddhist.[3] In fact, Ambedkar, regard as the father of the Indian Constitution and liberator of the Depressed Classes in India, is one of the most remarkable men in Indian history. Ambedkar was a politician, writer, revolutionist, and advocator of the neo-Buddhist movement in India.

B. His childhood and education

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, known as Babasaheb, was the fourteenth child in the family which belonged to the untouchable caste of *mahārs* of Maharashtra, who traditionally worked as village menials.[4] His father was headmaster of an army normal school in Mhow (now Mahu),

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[3] Dhananjay Keer, *Dr. Ambedkar: life and mission* (Bombay, India: Popular Prakashan Private Limited, 1990), 59. Johannes Beltz, "Introduction," in *Reconstructing the world: B.R. Ambedkar and Buddhism in India*, ed. Surendra Jondhale and Johannes Beltz (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1.

[4] The word "Caste" was used since seventeenth century in Indian context; it came from the Spanish word of "Casta," which means pure. Ketkar classified "Caste" into two social characteristics: confined membership by birth and exclusive endogamy (Shridhar Venkatesh Ketkar, *The history of caste in India: evidence of the laws of Manu on the*

India. While in his early life he was suffered various prejudices in school and society, he was supported by many social reformers who stood up for the rights of the untouchable people. For instance, through the recognition of Ambedkar's outstanding personal capabilities, K.A. Keluskar, a Hindu reformer for the cause of the Depression Class, aided Ambedkar's education when his family moved to Bombay and provided the first insight into Buddha's thought by giving a book on the life of the Buddha in Marathi language. Besides, the Gaikwad of Baroda and Shahu Chhatrapati of Kolhapur, non-brahman princes, helped him to finance his education, which eventually allowed him to finish a Ph.D. degree at Columbia University in New York, a D.Sc. degree at the University of London, and the title of barrister at Grey's Inn in London.[5]

C. Reasons of his fight for equal rights

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social (Ithaca, NY: Messrs. Taylor & Carpenter Booksellers and Publishers, 1909), 12, 15). The Mahars, one of the low castes, are granted by the Brahman the questionable privilege of eating the animals which die without killing, and whom he considers only good enough to live outside the village walls, although they may act as scavengers within them (W.J. Wanless, M.D. Miraj, "A Composite Medical Mission," *The Assembly herald*, vol. 11, by Presbyterian Church in the USA. General Assembly (USA: The Official Publication of the Presbyterian Church in the USA, 1905), 168). They lived in the Maratha country (Ketkar, 86). Mahar, a caste-cluster, or group of many endogamous castes, living chiefly in Maharashtra state, India, and in adjoining states. They mostly speak Marathi, the official language of Maharashtra. In the early 1980s the Mahar community was believed to constitute about 9 percent of the total population of Maharashtra—by far the largest, most widespread, and most important of all the region's officially designated Scheduled Castes (people of the lowest social class, who had been branded "untouchable" before the Constitution of 1949 outlawed discrimination against them). Traditionally, the Mahar lived on the outskirts of villages and performed a number of duties for the entire village. Their duties included those of village watchman, messenger, wall mender, adjudicator of boundary disputes, street sweeper, and remover of carcasses. They also worked as agricultural laborers and held some land, though they were not primarily farmers. In the mid-20th century, the Mahar began to migrate in large numbers to urban centrals (e.g., Mumbai [Bombay], Nagpur, Pune [Poona], and Sholapur), where they were employed as masons, industrial laborers, railway workers, mechanics, and bus and truck drivers. The Mahar were unified by the eminent 20th-century leader Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, who urged them to militant political consciousness and to great educational improvement. Before his death in 1956, Ambedkar and hundreds of thousands of his Mahar followers converted to Buddhism in protest against their Hindu caste status ("Mahar." *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, 2011. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/357931/Mahar> (accessed, Jan. 25, 2011).

[5] Eleanor Zelliot, "Ambedkar, B. R." *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Ed. Lindsay Jones. 2nd ed. Vol. 1. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005. 285-287. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?&id=GALE%7CCX3424500126&v=2.1&u=uwest&it=r&p=GVRL&sw=w (accessed, Jan. 24, 2011).

There are several reasons why Ambedkar fought for equal rights in Hindu society for the Depressed Classes. Mainly and personally, he was mistreated seriously by other caste people where later on, he stood up to fight for the cause of the untouchable people. Since he was born in the Depressed Classes, he encountered several prejudical incidents during his youth. At school at Satara, he was made to sit outside the class room on a piece of gunny mat, which he had to carry the school. He had to go without water, not because there was no water, but because he was an untouchable, who had no right to drink from a public source. Second, at Satara again some teachers would not touch his note-books for fear of being polluted. Third, "Touch me not" was a common theme for him outside of the school. Fourth, even when people recognized him as a man of learning and high official in the Baroda State in 1917, he was treated in an inhuman ways; no drinking water was available in his office; his subordinates kept a distance from him; low-paid workers threw files and papers on his desk from a distance due to the fear of being polluted. Fifth, at Baroda, he was thrown out from a public hotel without any accommodation. Hence, he had to resign in frustration and returned to Bombay. Sixth, even when he taught at the college level as a professor, he was treated as a Pariah by the Hindu professors and was not allowed to drink water from the pot kept in the Professors' common room.[6] Seventh, while he practiced as a barrister in a High Court of Bombay, the solicitors would not condescend to have any business with him on the ground of untouchability. Even a humble canteen boy would not serve him tea.[7]

D. His involvement in politics

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[6] Pariah means low caste people (N. Appaji Rao, *The Indian human heritage* (Hyderabad, India: University Press Limited, 1998), 54.

[7] D.C. Ahir, "Dr. Ambedkar's Pilgrimate to Buddhism," in *Dr. Ambedkar, Buddhism and Social Change*, ed. by A.K. Narain and D.C. Ahir (Delhi, India: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1994), 1-2.

In opposition to the Indian National Congress, Ambedkar founded the Independent Labor Party during the British governmental reforms of the mid-1930s. In 1937, there were eleven Scheduled Castes in the Bombay Legislative Assembly.[8] In spite of Ambedkar's efforts of creating two political parties, the Scheduled Castes Federation in 1942 and the Republican Party in 1956, there was only little progress in obtaining the number of seats.[9]

As a Minister of Law (1947-1951) in India's first Independent ministry, he secured effectively the guaranteed rights for the untouchables and appointed a position of Labor member in the viceroy's executive council (1942–1946). As a chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution (1947–1948), considered as "modern Manu," he and Gandhi provided the provisional outlawing of the practice of untouchability.[10]

E. His advocacy for the rights of the untouchable people

In the midst of his education abroad, he returned to India in 1917 for a three-year period to participate in two conferences for the Depressed Classes, to testify to the Government Franchise Commission on the political and social rights of untouchables, and to initiate a newspaper entitled *Mūknayāk* (The voice of the mute), which became the foundational hallmarks of his lifelong political and social reformation.[11]

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[8] The government placed untouchable castes on a schedule to receive representation in parliamentary bodies and government employment (Zelliot, "Ambedkar, B. R."286).
[9] Zelliot. "Ambedkar, B. R."287.
[10] Ibid.,
[11] Ibid.,

After he returned and lived permanently in India in 1923, he devoted his energies to advocate for the political and social rights for the untouchables through involvement in various governmental functions, while he taught and practiced law.[12]

Through his testimonies at various parliamentary commissions for the cause of Indian democratization, he was selected as a representative to the Round Table conferences in London in 1930 and 1931. He also demanded the separate electorate for the untouchables as same as that of the Muslim, Sikhs, and other minorities.[13]

His newspapers, *Bahishkrit Bhārat* (Excluded India), *Janata* (People), and *Prabuddha Bhārat* (Awakened India), which succeeded *Mūknayāk*, were widely circulated in spite of an extremely low literacy rate among the Untouchables. To uplift the literacy levels of the untouchable people and their children, he found the People's Education Society which established the Siddharth College in Bombay in 1946 and Milind College in Aurangabad in 1951. After his death in 1956, this society founded Ambedkar College in Poona in 1982 and runs two dozen institutions in the early twenty-first century. At the same time, the Dalit Sahitya movement has become an important force in the Marathi language and has influenced similar schools of literature in other languages.[14]

F. His idea of democracy

[12] Zelliot, "Ambedkar, B. R."287.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Dalit Sahitya means the literature of the oppressed (Zelliot, "Ambedkar, B. R." 286).

According to him, the development of democracy should be rested in three spheres of human life: political, social, and economic. Especially, social democracy is a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality, and fraternity.[15]

G. His frustration in politics

A compromise of the Poona Pact of 1932 included an exchange of separate electorates for more reserved seats for the Depressed Classes after Gandhi's fasting against the disparities in Indian society. Nonetheless, Ambedkar expressed his frustration and doubt about its real intention for uplifting the untouchables through the book *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*, which accused the Gandhian form of paternalism in 1945.[16]

Chapter Two. His search for a religious solution

In general, man needs both material and spiritual life. Otherwise, according to Ambedkar, communist philosophy is to "fatten the pigs," as though men are no better than pigs. He emphasized further that "Between man and animal, there is the difference of developing sentient mind."[17] This prompted Carle to call political economy as a pig philosophy.[18]

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[15] Eugenia Yurlova, "Social Equality and Democracy in Ambedkar's Understanding of Buddhism," in *Reconstructing the world: B.R. Ambedkar and Buddhism in India*, ed. Surendra Jondhale and Johannes Beltz (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 89.
[16] Zelliot. "Ambedkar, B. R." 287.
[17] C.D. Naik, *Ambedkar's Perspective on Buddhism and other religion* (Delhi, India: Kalpaz Publication, 2009), 283.
[18] Ibid., 277.

In addition, although Marxism viewed religion as an opium, and others follow the maxim of "eat, drink, and be merry," it would not make him irreligious even he had labored very hard with excessive sufferings (of being discriminated).[19]

A. His definition of religion

According to Ambedkar, religion is the propounding of an ideal scheme of divine governance, the aim and object of which is to make the social order in which men live a moral order.[20]

B. His thoughts about the problem of inequality in religion

The ultimate divergences and inequality of religions exist obviously because each individual has different subjective religious attitudes, both in non-essential and essential features, different personal lives, different temperaments, different religious instincts, and different religious experiences.[21] The inequality of religion may be complicated through various concepts and contents of religion, which is: individualistic; social; ritual; mystical; belief; experience; ethical; divine content; cognitive and non-cognitive in its statement; theological; eschatological; other-worldly.[22]

C. His proposal for a true religion

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[19] Lella Karunyakara, *Modernization of Buddhism: contributions of Ambedkar and Dalai Lama XIV* (New Delhi, India: Gyan Publishing House, 2002), 246-247.
[20] Naik, 120.

[21] For example, each individual has four religious instincts of: curiosity, self-abasement; flight, and parental instinct. Also, five factors may determine personal religious experience: organic or bodily needs; mental capacity; psychogenic desires, interest, and spiritual values; pursuit of rational explanation or meaning; and culture and conformity of individual surrounding (Naik, 125).

[22] Naik, 123.

First, he wanted to transcend the limits of nineteenth-century theistic discourse. Second, he departed from Mahatma Pule's deism and Ranade's neo-bhagvat dharma, while he anchored his position in the Buddhist tradition. Third, he offered a modernist understanding of Eastern and Western religions. Fourth, he defined sociability in term of morality. Fifth, his doctrine of dharma has also helped elevate secularist discourse in India above the antagonism between tradition and modernity and between reason and faith. Sixth, by blending the Buddha's project of dukkhamukti (freedom from misery) with Marx's project of freedom from exploitation, he showed the way to fight caste and class inequalities.[23]

He emphasized the Buddha's message of religion: "The center of religion lay in the relation between man and man, not between man and God. The purpose of religion is to teach man how he should behave towards other men so that all may be happy."[24] Hence, according to him, religion is to explain the origin of the world.[25]

In the article "Buddha and the Future of His Religion," Ambedkar's perspective of a true religion consists of four characteristics: it must remain the governing principle in every society in the sense of morality; it must be in accord with reason which is merely another name for science if it is to function; its moral code must recognize the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality, and fraternity; and it must not sanctify or ennoble poverty.[26]

D. His view of the contemporary religions in India

1. His view of Hinduism

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[23] Yashwant Sumant, "Situating Religion in Ambedkar's Political Discourse," in *Reconstructing the world: B.R. Ambedkar and Buddhism in India*, ed. Surendra Jondhale and Johannes Beltz (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 76, 77.
[24] Yurlova, 81.
[25] Ibid., 81.
[26] Ahir, 8.

a. His finding about the underpinning of inequality: Laws of Manu

In the scheme of Manu, the Brahmin is placed at the first in rank. Below him is the Kshatriya. Below Kshatriya is the Vaishva. Below Vaishva is the Shudra, and below Shudra is the Ati-Shudra (the Untouchables).[27] Untouchable**,** also called Dalit, officially Scheduled Caste, formerly Harijan, in traditional Indian society, the former name for any member of a wide range of low-caste Hindu groups and any person outside the caste system.[28] Ambedkar postulated that the Untouchables emerged in the seven century A.D.[29]

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[27] Nagendra Kr Singh, *Ambedkar on religion* (New Delhi, India: Anmol Publications PVT., LTD, 2000), 53. According to the writer, the responsibilities of the Sudras or servants were to serve as the slaves for the twice-born castes without resentment [otherwise the universe would shake in chaos], obey the Vedic scholar priest without a sense of "I" [and he will take superior rebirth in the future], serve the king once per month, and be lifetime servant even his master may set him free (Wendy Doniger and Brian K. Smith, trans., *The Law of Manu* (Auckland, New Zealand: Penguin Books, 1991), 13, 142, 195, 196). If a servant neglects his duty, he will become a "moth-eater" ghost (Doniger, 285). If he is unable to engage in the service of the twice-born or nearly lose his wife and sons, he should do a manual labor or various handicrafts (Doniger, 245). In marriage, whenever a woman of the servant class married a man of superior class, she should hold the fringe of his garment (Doniger, 47). If he commits the offenses (i.e. stealing things from others) he should pay a fine equal to eight times the value of the stolen item (Doniger, 187). Since he is the lowest caste in society, he would be punished severely if he harms any people in the higher castes; the writer mentioned that if he hits or harms any part of the higher caste's body, the king should cut off that very part of his body (Doniger, 182, 183). Only servant gives witness for servants. For courtesy, when someone meets the servant, he should ask his health (Doniger, 30). A servant should get through an extremity by means of wealth (Doniger, 254). A servant is purified by the water that touches on the tip of his lips (Doniger, 24). He becomes clean after a month of death (Doniger, 108).

[28]Dalit, considered condescending and offensive of the social disabilities associated with it, was declared illegal in India in 1949 and in Pakistan in 1953. Mahatma Gandhi called untouchables Harijans ("Children of the God Hari Vishnu,"). Instead of using the term Dalit, the official designation Scheduled Caste is the most common term. Many different hereditary castes have been traditionally subsumed under the title *untouchable*, each of which subscribes to the social rule of endogamy (marriage exclusively within the caste community) that governs the caste system in general. Traditionally, the groups characterized as untouchable were those whose occupations and habits of life involved ritually polluting activities, of which the most important were (1) taking life for a living such as fishing, (2) killing or disposing of dead cattle or working with their hides for a living, (3) pursuing activities that brought the participant into contact with emissions of the human body, such as feces, urine, sweat, and spittle such as sweepers and washer men, and (4) eating the flesh of cattle or of domestic pigs and chickens. Orthodox Hindus regarded the hill tribes of India as untouchables not because they were primitive or pagan but because they were eaters of beef and of the scavenging village pigs and chickens. Much confusion arose on this issue because the unassimilated hill tribes never accepted their relegation to the ranks of the untouchables, nor did they seem to realize that their status was decided on a purely behavioral basis. Until the adoption of the new constitutions in independent India and Pakistan, the untouchables were subjected to many social restrictions, which increased in severity from north to south in India. In many cases, they were segregated in hamlets outside the town or village boundary. They were forbidden entry to many temples, to most schools, and to wells from which higher castes drew water. Their touch was seen as seriously polluting to people of higher caste, involving much remedial ritual. In southern India, even the sight of some untouchable groups was once held to be polluting, and they were forced to live a nocturnal

b. His thoughts about the problem of inequality in Hinduism

Prior to the advent of the Buddha, India was unaware of the ethics of equality and universal brotherhood. The Vedic society was based on the principle of graded inequality.[30] Specifically, by following the scheme of Manu, Hinduism does not recognize equality of men because it follows a ranking system and order of gradation: first rank, Brahman; second rank, Kshatriya; third rank, Vaishya; fourth rank, Shudra; fifth rank, the Ati-Shudra (untouchables).[31] This graded inequality is more treacherous than that of the inequality. Namely, inequality contains the potential of self-destruction, because under the pure and simple inequality of its short-life, inequality creates general discontent which forms the seed of revolution, and it provides the opportunity of the suffers to rise against the common foe and on the common grievance. Graded inequality excludes the above factors, because it prevents the rise of general discontent and revolution against inequality, and the impossibility of the combined forces from all classes to overthrow the inequality since each class may have advantage and disadvantage within that inequality system. For instance, regarding the Manu's governance of marriage, the Brahman has the right to take a woman from the three lower classes, but not to give a Brahmin

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existence. These restrictions led many untouchables to seek some degree of emancipation through conversion to Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism. The modern constitution of India formally recognized the plight of the untouchables by legally establishing their ethnic subgroups as Scheduled Castes (a population of some 170 million in the early 21st century). In addition, the designation Scheduled Tribes (about 85 million) was given to the indigenous peoples of the country who fall outside of the Indian social hierarchy. Besides banning untouchability, the constitution provides these groups with specific educational and vocational privileges and grants them special representation in the Indian parliament. In support of these efforts, the Untouchability (Offenses) Act (1955) provides penalties for preventing anyone from enjoying a wide variety of religious, occupational, and social rights on the grounds that he or she is from a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe. Despite such measures, the traditional divisions between pure and polluted caste groups persist in some levels of Indian society, making full emancipation of these groups slow to come about. "Untouchable." *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/618508/untouchable> (accessed, Jan. 25, 2011).

29 B.R. Ambedkar, *The Untouchables* (U.P, India: National Herald Press, 1969), 199.
30 Ahir, "Dr. Ambedkar's Pilgrimage to Buddhism," 6.
31 Naik, 121.

class's woman to them. Although the Kshatriya may have resentment toward the Brahman, he will not stand up against the Brahman with other lower classes on the basis that he also has the right to take a woman from the two lower classes. Also, if he fights against this inequality system, and even if he could be able to have the same right as the Brahman, the other lower castes (Vaishyas and Shudra) may rise to the same level as his (Kshatriya).[32]

Inequality persists when it is consecrated by religion, and it perishes if it is not so consecrated. Hinduism still persists with its official doctrine of inequality because this principle has been given by divine origin and religious connection. Furthermore, in spite of being consecrated and sacred by divine forces, the primitive and modern religions do not have a particular form of social structure, which defines the concrete role and relationship between man and man. On the other hand, being consecrated by religion and made sacred, eternal and inviolate, Hinduism probably is the only religious system in the world that establishes the concrete social order of the relation of man to man, the economic order of the relation of workman to workman, and the political order of people to people.[33]

c. His refutation to Hinduism

To refute Hinduism, Ambedkar provided the classification of social and religious types including: preservation of life as common characteristics of religion in any society; in savage societies or pre-state societies of hunting and gathering tribes, primitive religion of having neither idea of God nor linked morality to religion; for the first religious revolution, in civilized societies or positive religion including the concept of God or Gods, and morality is sanctified by religion; from civilized societies sprang out two society: antique society, religion founded on

[32] Naik, 120.
[33] Ibid., 122, 123.

kinship between God and worshippers, “fatherhood of God,” in physical sense. Each god, among many gods, is linked to a community, religion, and nationality identification. Morality based on utility that each individual was subordinated to society; through second religious revolution, “modern society” exists in which god was eliminated from physical composition of society. God served as a universal god of all, and God served as abstract and absolute good. Nationality is disassociated from religion. Morality based on justice to serve individual as end.[34] While many of Ambedkar’s contemporaries considered Hinduism as a primitive religion, Ambedkar regarded it as a positive religion, which emerged at a particular time in history with its own scheme of divine governing the religious, ritualistic, and social life of people. Namely, Hinduism, a revived form of Brahminism, emerged after the defeat of Buddhism. It has its written constitution of *Manusmṛti*, which was founded by Manu, to establish the non-egalitarian order, as it justified the varna and the caste system as a divine scheme of social order. Since Brahminism was ritualistic and advocated violence, Hinduism also has the characteristics of violence, anti-equality, and ritual. After a close examination of principles of justice for liberty, equality, and fraternity, Ambedkar concluded that Hinduism is devoid of any set of principles that would guide the moral conscience of the individual.[35]

Ambedkar further analyzed Hinduism through several perspectives. First, the cultural unity of India is formed through the Bramanical cultures of its ideas, values, customs, and religions (not in terms of race and invasion), which placed the leading role of Brahmin as

[34] Gail Omvedt, “Confronting Brahmatic Hinduism: Dr. Ambedkar’s Sociology of Religion and Indian Society,” in *Reconstructing the world: B.R. Ambedkar and Buddhism in India*, ed. Surendra Jondhale and Johannes Beltz (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 54-61.
[35] Sumant, 71-72.

intellectual class and the imitation of it by the rest of the society.[36] Second, there is a caste system of many different castes.[37] Third, authority and power may have religious bases. Namely, the Brahmin, as the intellectual class, has the religious authority to assign status to different sections of society, to define hierarchy of dignities, and to offer a specific organization of society.[38] Fourth, the religious foundation of the Hindu social order is the Purusasukta, which actually gives "a divine injunction prescribing a particular form of the constitution of society" and that form is not imposed by force, but is accepted, and internalized by all because they all share the belief in the sacrality of the books whose knowledge are the monopoly of the Brahmins.[39] Ambedkar recognized clearly that the Brahmins have been able "to idealize the real, and to realize the ideal," through the slogan "Caste is divine, and caste is sacred." As the result, the practice of untouchability just follows that ideal scheme of the fixed and permanent warrants through the principle of graded inequality among the four classes with an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt.[40] Fifth, Ambedkar also recognized the basis of the Hindu social order placing on the graded inequality, which in his view is very dangerous because it is a kind of built-in mechanism that guarantees the perpetuation of the social system and

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[36] Olivier Herrenschmidt, "Ambedkar and the Hindu Social Order," in *Reconstructing the world: B.R. Ambedkar and Buddhism in India*, ed. Surendra Jondhale and Johannes Beltz (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 39.

[37] Herrenschmidt, 39. Philosophically, the Manu writer believed that the past karma determined the innate quality (gunas) of the four castes: goodness (satva) belonging to the Brahmin; activity (rajas) belonging to the ksaya; and darkness (tamas) belonging to the Vaisya and Sudra. Namely, if one had done good deeds in a previous life, one would go into the superior womb (of Brahmin and Ksatriya); if one had done bad deeds in the past life, one would go into inferior womb (of Vaishya and Sudra). If the lower caste is doing good deeds and obeying this Law of Manu now, he will obtain a higher caste in the next life (Ketkar, 114-115).

[38] Herrenschmidt, 40.

[39] The earliest speculation regarding the origin of the four varnas is to be found in the mythical story of the creation embodied in the Purusasukta (hymn of man) of the Rg Veda (Ram Sharan Shama, *Sudras in Ancient India* (Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers PVT. LTD, 1990), 32. Legendarily, amongst the most famous of all Vedic hymns is the *Purusasükta* whose gods created the cosmos by performing a sacrifice of Purusa, or personified man, from the various organs of whose body the essential phenomena of the cosmos, including the four *varnas* social categories. His mouth became the Brahmin priest; his arms were transformed into the Warrior Kshatriyas*;* his thighs were the Vaisyas or commoners; from his feet, the Servants Sudras were born (Brian K. Smith, *Classifying the Universe* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 27-28).

[40] Herrenschmidt, 40-42.

"prevents the rise of general discontent against inequality." Namely, Hinduism has survived for millennia because it gives everyone social advantages, expresses its difference from the others, and creates its identity and its uniqueness.[41]

d. His thoughts about the problem of untouchability

Ambedkar also emphasized strongly the wrong notion of untouchability: "Untouchability is an aspect of social psychology: it is a sort of nausea of one group against another group. Caste is a notion, and it is a state of mind, but it is also 'a disease of the mind.'"[42] He mentioned the difference between men and beasts. While beasts need nothing save their daily food for existence, men should develop a healthy body and pure and enthusiastic mind. He referred to the saying of Ramdas, a Maharashtrian Saint, that if a man lacks enthusiasm, either his mind or body is in a diseased condition, because life would become a drudgery-a mere burden to be dragged and individual loses hope to get an opportunity to elevate oneself. When one breathes in an atmosphere where one is sure of getting the legitimate reward for one's labors, only then one feels enriched by enthusiasm and inspiration. For inspiration and enthusiasm, one must have a healthy and sound mind. So long as the untouchables continue to slave under the yoke of Hinduism, a diabolical creed, they can have no hope, no inspiration, and no enthusiasm for a better life. The Scheduled Castes can never feel enthusiastic about and derive inspiration from Hinduism.[43]

e. His postulation of Broken Men as previous Buddhists

[41] Herrenschmidt, 43-45.
[42] Ibid., 46.
[43] Karunyakara, 246-247.

His postulation of Untouchables as the former Buddhists was so convincing.[44] Although many scholars disagree with his theory, most accept Ambedkar's date when Untouchables were formed around the fourth century A.D.[45] In this theory, he put a hypothesis that the Broken Men or the Untouchables were Buddhists, even though he acknowledged no evidence in his hypothesis. He pointed out that the Broken Men did not employ the Brahmin as their priests and regard them as impure. In the meantime, the Brahmin disliked the Broken Men because they were Buddhists and preached against them with hatred. As a result, the Broken Men came to be regarded as Untouchables. In short, according to his hypothesis, the Broken men hated the Brahmins because the Brahmins were the enemies of Buddhism, and the Brahmins imposed untouchability upon the Broken Men because they would not leave Buddhism.[46] Actually, Buddhist culture is the unbroken earliest Recluse Tradition of the Sindhu Non-Aryans interrupted by the comparatively inferior aggressive Vedic Aryas.[47]

f. His act of burning the *Law of Manu*

At a conference for the Depressive Classes in Mahad of Bombay, he had burned some portions of the classic Hindu law book, the *Manusmṛti*, that discriminated against low castes.[48]

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[44] Historically, before the white, tall, and cultured Aryans invaded Northwest India, there was no stratification of priest, warrior, merchant, or slave in India. After the Aryans' invasion of India and their population grew, to maintain the order, personal privilege, and control over the non-Aryan indigenous people, they devised a caste scheme of Varna system which divided society into quadripartite structures of Brahman or the priests, Kshatriyas or royal nobles, Vaisyas or common people among the Aryans, and Sudras or the conquered indigenous people (Smith, 27). As the Aryan invaders became natives in the occupied areas and some of original inhabitants were assimilated into some degree within Aryan society, the latter came to be known as "Sudras" and took over the bottom rung in social order, namely below the Vaishyas, the commoners or peasantry (Smith, 15).

[45] Eleanor Zelliot, "B.R. Ambedkar and the Search for a Meaningful Buddhism," in *Reconstructing the world: B.R. Ambedkar and Buddhism in India*, ed. Surendra Jondhale and Johannes Beltz (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 27, 28.

[46] Ambedkar, *The Untouchables*, 96-99.

[47] Naik, 126.

[48] The *Law of Manu* (100 BCE- 100 CE), the *Manavadharmasastra* or *Manusmrti* (in Sanskrit), means the laws or treatise of the wise human race. It is the centerpiece of Hinduism's *varnasram-dharma*, the social and religious responsibilities of social class and stage of life, which include the family life, psychology, concepts of the body, sex,

After the final failure of guaranteeing the untouchables' rights of participation in public festivals, temple entry, Vedic wedding rituals, and the wearing of the sacred thread, in 1935 he declared that although he was born a Hindu he would not die a Hindu. He finally concluded that the untouchables could achieve the freedom only outside the Hindu religion.[49]

On the night of December 25, 1927, Ambedkar and his followers publicly and ceremonially burned one of the most celebrated of all such scriptures, the notorious *Manusmriti* or "Institute of Manu," which had governed the life of the Hindu community for fifteen hundred years and which "decried the Shudras, stunted their growth, impaired their self-respect, and perpetuated their social, economic, religious and political slavery." It was one of the great iconoclastic acts of history, and the greatest blow to orthodox Hinduism that suppressed the Shudras who had suffered for more than a thousand years.[50]

After his failure to secure the basic right and equal status for the Depressed Classes in the Hindu society during the Kalaram Temple entry movement in 1930, on the eve of the Yeola Conference that was convened by the leaders of the Depressed Classes and attended by about ten thousand untouchables of all representatives, Ambedkar announced that "Although I was born as a Hindu, I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu."[51] His declaration can be seen from

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human relationship, caste, politics, money, law, purification and pollution, ritual, social practice and ideal, karma, redemption, and worldly and transcendental goals (Doniger, xvii-xviii). It was compiled by priestly and householder Brahmins for them and for their paradigmatic human and spiritual authoritarian throughout many centuries (Doniger, xxiii). Its themes focus on the karma and rebirth, the purification and restoration, and good and bad people (Doniger, l-li).

[49] Zelliot. "Ambedkar, B. R."287.

[50] Sangharashita, *Ambedkar and Buddhism* (Glasgow, UK: Windhorse Publications, 1986), 55-56

[51] Keer, 252-253.

very different sociological, historical, juridical, and political perspectives. All of them represent and address various aspects of his complex personality and his program of social reform.[52]

g. The effect of his rejection of Hinduism and the proposing from the other traditions to him

The reactions from this announcement were immediate and far-reaching. Some untouchable people took it as a hint to convert into Christianity, or Islam, or Sikhism, which was not Ambedkar's intention at all. A Muslim leader, Nizam of Hyderabad known as 'the Richest Man in the World," offered Ambedkar the sum of forty or fifty million rupees if he would undertake to convert the whole untouchable community to Islam. Bishop Badley of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Bombay welcomed Ambedkar's statement to bring the untouchables for a better life.[53] However, Ambedkar scoffed at these tempting offers and rejected the same without any hesitation.[54]

2. His view of Christianity

The Christian ideal of equality embraces a number of features borrowed from Hebrew, Greek, and Roman sources. Christianity has always accepted the principle of hierarchy in both church and society, while at the same time holding the doctrine of equality to be relevant "only in terms of eschatological promise.[55] False doctrine also aggravates the intensity of inequality in religion. Regarding Christ and his church, Hobbes contends that of all the abuses that constitute the kingdom of darkness, the greatest arise from the false doctrine that "present church now militant on earth is the Kingdom of God. The papacy is no other than the ghost of the deceased

[52] Beltz, "Introduction," in *Reconstructing the world*, 1.
[53] Sangharashita, 61-62.
[54] Narain, 4.
[55] Francis M. Wilhoit, *The Quest for equality in freedom* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, Inc., 1979), 16.

Roman Empire, sitting crowned upon the grave thereof. M.Couchoud affirms that "Jesus is misclassed when placed in the series of great religious reformers Zoroaster, Confucius, Mani, Mahomet, and Luther.[56]

3. His view of Islam

Regarding Islam, social inequality and the obedience of women, which are values sanctioned by Islam and enforced by the patriarchal gender structure, encourage violence toward women.[57]

In short, why Ambedkar was not attracted by either Islam or Christianity was because of two reasons. First, he was in favor of an Indian indigenous religion. Second, he found certainly that neither Islam nor Christianity had been able to get rid of the evil caste system.[58]

4. His view of Sikhism

In the meantime, being frightening by the threat of the untouchables swelling the ranks of the non-Hindus, some Hindu leaders pressured Ambedkar to give a try to the Sikh religion on the plea that Sikhism was a part of Bharatiya culture. Accordingly, the Sikhs established the Khalsa College for the Depressed Classes and honored Ambedkar as the chairman of the College Committee. However, within a year Ambedkar was frustrated with Sikhism. His association with the Sikh mission came to an abrupt end, because according to Ambedkar's assessment, the Sikhs were no better than the Hindus so far as caste distinctions were concerned.[59]

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[56] Naik, 124, 125.
[57] David Ghanim, *Gender and violence in the Middle East* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2009), 55.
[58] Narain, 4.
[59] Ibid., 4-5.

5. His view of Communism

Regarding communism, Karl Marx viewed religion as an opium of people. As a result, communism and religion are incompatible.[60] Only through violence can break up the existing system sufficiently; and only through the dictatorship of the proletariat can reconstruct and continue the new system.[61]

a. His thought, his collaboration, and his rejection of communism

While Ambedkar appreciated some aspects of Marxism, he did not accept some of its basic principles such as the violence and the dictatorship of the proletariat.[62] Indeed, Ambedkar posed a big question on Marxism's violent approach: "They can get quick results by using force. What will happen when dictatorship disappears?"[63]

Although Ambedkar initially collaborated with the communists to form a united front against the capitalist Congress of India, who exploited the lower classes, later on he openly opposed communism due to its violent and terroristic nature.[64]

Chapter Three. His conversion to Buddhism

A. His previous and contemporary people who followed the Buddhist path

Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism had not been an isolated decision but seemed to draw together the different strands of his personality. It expressed his personal convictions as

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[60] Karl marx, *Karl Marx et al, Marxism, Socialism, and Religion* (Newtown, Australia: Resistance Books, 2001), 135.
[61] Naik, 275.
[62] Ambedkar listed out four important residues of Marxism (Yurlova, 91).
[63] Yurlova, 92.
[64] Ibid., 85.

well as his political and social vision.[65] Eleanor Zelliot proposes Ambedkar's interest in Buddhism in seven categories.[66] Zelliot provides a list of the early converts to Buddhism, who might have direct and indirect connections with Ambedkar such as a high-caste Dharmanand Kosambi, the Marxist maverick Rahul Sankrityanan, Anand Kausalyayan, Jagdish Kashyap, S. Radhakrishnan, Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, Ananda Nair, U. Chandramani (who transmitted the Buddhist vows to Ambedkar in 1956), and others.[67] Zelliot also briefly discusses how Buddhist revivals in the south might have influenced Ambedkar's thoughts such as Appaduraiyar, Lakshmi Narasu, and others.[68]

B. His encounter with Buddhism

1. His Buddhist resources and exposure to Buddhism

In the search for a faith to mobilize and liberate the Untoucables, Ambedkar's lifelong reading of scholarly works on the history and teachings of Buddhism included more than twenty thousand volumes of rich collections throughout his school years and subsequent visits to New York, London, and Bonn.[69] Ambedkar's frequent exposure to living Buddhist traditions in Burma, Sri Lanka, and others, and his appreciation of Buddhist art in various places such as the Ellora and Ajanta caves might have influenced on his religious endeavor too.[70]

C. His view of Buddhism

[65] Beltz, 2.
[66] Zelliot, "B.R. Ambedkar and the Search for a Meaningful Buddhism," 18.
[67] Ibid., 19, 20.
[68] Zelliot, "B.R. Ambedkar and the Search for a Meaningful Buddhism," 22-24.
[69] Ibid., 24, 25.
[70] Zelliot, 26, 27.

Regarding Buddhism, only the conversion of a man and his changing in moral disposition can break up the existing system sufficiently; and only the voluntary adherence to the path leading to the cessation of exploitation and misery can reconstruct and continue the new system.[71]

In the article “Buddha and the Future of His Religion,” Ambedkar’s perspective of a true religion consists of four characteristics: it must remain the governing principle in every society in the sense of morality; it must be in accord with reason which is merely another name for science if it is to function; its moral code must recognize the fundamental tenets of liberty, equality, and fraternity; and it must not sanctify or ennoble poverty.[72] He said further that only Buddhism can satisfy all these tests, and it is the only religion the world can have.[73]

Buddhism is essentially rationalist and humanist in its approach to life.[74] To Ambedkar, Buddhist principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity were not modern concepts taken from the French Revolution, but they were taught by the Buddha for more than twenty-five hundred years. Buddhist rationalism and humanism had no place for coercion and exploitation. As Edwin Arnold said “Buddhism is the grandest manifestation of freedom ever proclaimed,” because its goal targets the liberation of mankind from all chains and fetters. That is liberty. Buddha pronounced the doctrine of equality in the dialogue of the Buddha and Assalayana, after freeing man from belief in God, from the domination of the Vedas, and from the power of Varnashram and caste. That is equality. The Buddha established the universal brotherhood within the sangha which transcends the limits of caste, creed, color, and gender. That is fraternity. As the father of

[71] Naik, 275.
[72] Ahir, 8.
[73] Ibid.,
[74] K.N. Kadam, “Dr. Ambedkar and Buddhism as an Instrument of Social Change,” in *Dr. Ambedkar, Buddhism and Social Change*, ed. by A.K. Narain and D.C. Ahir (Delhi, India: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1994), 42.

Indian Constitution, Ambedkar placed these principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity greatly in the Preamble to Constitution.[75]

D. His comparison and choice: Buddhism or Marxism

Ambedkar pointed out some similarity between Marxism and Buddhism in the contexts of exploitation of the class and sufferings of sentient beings, respectively. Namely, he found some close affinity between Marxism's rejection of the exploitation with that of the Buddha's attitude towards property.[76] However, although the end is common to both, their means are different.[77]

By the comparison between the creeds of the Buddha and that of Marxism, Ambedkar concluded that both systems deal with the problems of: the conflict of interest between class and class; the private ownership of property creating power to one class and sorrow to another through exploitation; and sorrow being removed through the abolition of private ownership for the good of society. Naik adds one more element of philosophy emphasizing the reconstruction of the world and not to waste time in explaining the origin of the world.[78]

Although both Buddhism and Marxism have a similar goal of elimination of the suffering, or misery, or exploitation, each has different means to achieve that goal.[79] In the opposition to Marxism's violence and dictatorship as a means of achieving aims, Ambedkar considered Buddhist nonviolence and democracy as a surest, a safest, and a soundest way, and he claimed that its moral and humanitarian aspects appealed to Indian people and suit them best of

[75] Kadam, 45.
[76] Yurlova, 91.
[77] Ibid., 92
[78] Naik, 274.
[79] Yurlova, 92.

all.[80] Violence, another name for the use of force, can be used in two ways: as energy for creative purposes; and as violence for destructive purposes. Buddhism opposed strongly the use of force in a violent way. Communism also follows the dictatorship or State government that has the right to enforce and severely discipline its citizens through the Rule of Law. Instead, Buddhism prefers the Rule of Righteousness, in which the citizens should be trained morally that they are sentiment for the government of righteousness without resorting to any brutal force.[81]

E. Reason why he chose Buddhism

Ambedkar also stressed that "Poverty made me no irreligious. Self-respect is more important that the material gains. Buddhism is for progress, not only for economic progress."[82] Also, according to Gokhale, some Buddhists features seem to have attracted Ambedkar towards it. First, Buddhism emphasized the role of reason as against faith or superstition. Second, as a result, Buddhism rejected many objects of dogmatic belief, such as God and soul, which were accepted by most of the other religions. Third, Buddhism strongly opposed the caste system. Fourth, Buddhism emphasized morality as an essence of good life. This morality according to Buddhism was essentially human-centric and had no reference to soul or to God. Ambedkar not only took these features seriously, but he also tried to elaborate some of them to their logical limit and attempted a reconstruction of Buddhism in that approach of bringing out a real essence

[80] Yurlova, 92.
[81] Naik, 274, 275.
[82] Ibid., 283.

of Buddhism according to his variant thoughts and ideas.[83] Also, there are other Buddhist characteristics that really attracted Ambedkar.

1. Its equality

Ambedkar fully believed that Buddhism is Saddhamma, which function is to promote equality between people.[84]

2. Its liberty and fraternity

He said that "I have derived my philosophy from religion of the Buddha in liberty, equality, and fraternity, not from political science."[85]

3. Its advocating for women's rights

Women positions in Buddhism were also a source of Ambedkar's inspiration to embrace Buddhism such as that of Mahaprajapati Gotami, the first Buddhist nun, and Visaka, the Buddha's chief female supporter.[86]

4. It is an indigenous religion of India, and it rejects of both God and soul

Ambedkar preferred Buddhism over other religions not only because it is indigenous and preaches egalitarianism but also because "There is no place for God and soul in the Buddhist religion."[87]

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[83] Pradeep P. Gokhale, "Universal Consequentialism: A Note on B.R. Ambedkar's Reconstruction of Buddhism with Special Reference to Religion, Morality, and Spirituality," in *Reconstructing the world: B.R. Ambedkar and Buddhism in India*, ed. Surendra Jondhale and Johannes Beltz (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 121.
[84] Saddhamma is the true dhamma, the best religion, the good practice, or the doctrine of the good (Thomas William Rhys Davids and William Stede, *The Pali-English dictionary* (New Delhi, India: Asian Educational Services, 1905), 675).
[85] Naik, 283.
[86] Zelliot, 28.

5. The Buddha's personal image

Also, the Buddha's physical image, his compassionate and colorful figure, his stories, the way in which he dealt with life, the way he is represented by artists throughout times made Ambedkar's Buddhism an appealing and satisfying religion.[88]

F. His actual conversion to Buddhism.

On October 3, 1954, he exhorted that, "My personal philosophy is to reject Hindu philosophy of Bhagavadagita which based on a cruel perversion of Sankhya philosophy of Kapila, the caste and graded inequality.[89] I have derived my philosophy from religion of the Buddha in liberty, equality, and fraternity, not from political science."[90]

Spiritually, since he was interested in Buddhism during his youth, he made a commitment to become a Buddhist together with a half million of his followers, mainly the untouchables, in October 1956 at Nagpur, two months before his death.[91] Having rejected Hindu religious, social, and political life as well as the possibility of converting to Christianity, Islam, Sikhism, or communism, Ambedkar made the final decision during the last months of his life in October 1956 with about half million Dalit people to convert to Buddhism as a mean for attaining equality and social liberation.[92] He also said that this conversion had given him enormous satisfaction and pleasure unimaginable. He felt as if he had been liberated from the hell.[93]

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[87] K.C. Das, *Indian dalits: voices, visions, and politics* (New Delhi, India: Global Vision Publishing House, 2004), 67.
[88] Zelliot, 29.
[89] Naik, 283.
[90] Ibid., 283.
[91] Zelliot. "Ambedkar, B. R."287.
[92] Yurlova, 93, 94.
[93] Ahir, 11.

G. Which form of Buddhism did he follow?

On October 13, 1956, a day before his formal conversion into Buddhism, Ambedkar convened a press conference to explain his position on conversion in which he declared to adopt neither Hīnayāna nor Mahāyāna, but Navayana (Neo-Buddhism). Namely, he adopted the actual teachings of the Buddha only.[94] Especially, his reinterpretations of the "Buddha's authentic teachings" were presented explicitly and mainly through the books "The Buddha and the Future of His Religion," and "The Buddha and His Dhamma." These books invited a mix reception. Some criticized him as having misinterpreted the Buddha's teaching, and some defended his view.[95]

H. The impact of his conversion to Buddhism

This historical event not only changed his spiritual life but also the course of Indian Buddhism because it marked the new era of Buddhist revival movement in India. Today in India, if there is respect and reverence for Buddhist values, and Buddhism is regarded as the broad highway to salvation by millions people, the credit mostly goes to Ambedkar.[96]

Afterward, following his inspiration of cutting off the psychological bonds of untouchability, millions of untouchables converted into Buddhism and dozens of Buddhist

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[94] Ramesh Chandra, *Identity and Genesis of Caste System in India* (New Delhi, India: Kalpaz Publication, 2005), 253.

[95] Ahir, 90.

[96] Ibid., 12, 13. As per the 1991 Census, Buddhist accounts for 0.8 percent of the total population, or 6.76 million in which was divided into two categories: the traditional Buddhists lived in the hilly areas of Ladakh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh; and the newly converted Buddhists lived in Maharashtra (6.3 per cent of the state's population), Uttar Pradesh (0.2 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (0.3 per cent), and West Bengal (0.3 per cent). The largest Buddhist concentration is in Sikkim, which has 27 per cent of the total Buddhist population in the country, followed by Arunachal Pradesh with 13 per cent (B.K. Prasad, *India's development agenda: issues, challenges and policies*, vol 1 (New Delhi, India: Anmol Publications PVT. LTD, 2005), 543).

temples have been built, especially in the state of Maharashtra. Currently, the untouchables still consider him as their savior and Bodhisattva. Since then, together with several of his writings in Buddhism such as *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, hundreds of books have been written many Dalit writers and Buddhists on Buddhist faith and practice, chiefly in Marathi.[97]

Since his death in 1956, his fame as a liberator for the untouchables has grown constantly. His statue can be found in almost every city and many villages in India and generally he is shown carrying a copy of the constitution of India. His birth day, conversion day, and death day are observed by millions and the Buddhist conversion movement continues to grow.[98]

Chapter Four. His contribution to Indian Buddhism

A. His reconstruction of Buddhism

He reminded his people that “the greatest thing that the Buddha has done is to tell the world that it cannot be reformed except by the reformation of the mind of the man and the mind of the world.” He expressed his deepest affection to the Buddha as: “Mother-like Buddha stood in contrast with Jesus, Mohammed, and Krishna in two aspects: self-renunciation and infallibility.”[99]

The purpose of Dharma, as a social teaching, is to reconstruct the world. Synonymous with Dharma, Ambedkar considered morality as an instrument of management of society, which regulates relations between its members. Ambedkar’s social message in his book *The Buddha*

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[97] In the book *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Ambedkar stressed a rational, humanitarian, egalitarian Buddhism drawn chiefly from Pali texts. Hindu beliefs and practices and any supernatural Buddhist ideas were eliminated (Zelliot. "Ambedkar, B. R."286).
[98] Zelliot, "Ambedkar, B. R." 285-287.

[99] Naik, 282.

and His Dharma provided a mean to solve the problem of social conflict between the Untouchables and caste Hindu.[100]

Ambedkar's books and articles on Buddhism include: *Buddha or Karl Marx; The Buddha and His Dharma; Buddha and the future of His religion*, and others. He also established the Siddharth College in Bombay in 1946, the Buddha Society in India in 1955, and others.

Ambedkar's effort to reconstruct Buddhism probably might be seen as a deviation from the *traditional* Buddhism, though it may or may not be a deviation from *original* Buddhism. Gokhale pointed out four features of Ambedkar's reconstruction of Buddhism. First, Ambedkar merely included Buddhist belief and practices to this world and this life, and excluded the belief in other worlds and past and future as well as the existence of consciousness independent of the body. Second, Ambedkar emphasized scientific rationality as a core of the Buddhist approach to the nature of the world and the individual. Essentially, Ambedkar considered whatever violated the authority of experience and reason as non-Buddhistic elements. Third, Ambedkar pushed aside the mystical elements from Buddhism such as *dhyāna* and Samadhi. Fourth, according to Ambedkar morality is the root of Buddhism, while other religions placed morality on the hands of metaphysical gods.[101]

1. Karma

Ambedkar said that "The Buddha's Law of karma applied only to karma and its effects on the present life. The extended Buddhist doctrine of karma, including past karma, is a most pernicious doctrine that is often found to be attributed to the Buddha." It was understandable that

[100] Yurlova, 81, 82.
[101] Gokhale, 124.

Ambedkar only supported this-worldly interpretation of karma doctrine and excluded the past life's karma, because it may justify the Hindu's explanation of the victims of social oppression by viewing their sufferings as punishment for misdeeds in former lives.[102] Furthermore, his view on soteriology might have been greatly influenced by his Columbia University professor, John Dewey. Ambedkar used a passage from Dewey's *Democracy and Education*: "An individual can live only in the present. The present is not just something which comes after the past; much less something produced by it. It is what life is in leaving the past behind it. The study of past products will not help us to understand the present."[103]

2. The Four Noble Truths

Regarding the Buddha's basic teachings, the Four Noble Truths, Ambedkar criticized them because, in his view, they deny hope to man and make the gospel of the Buddha a gospel of pessimism. Instead of recognizing the attribution of sufferings to the mental states of ignorance and craving, Ambedkar blamed social conditions as the cause for massive sufferings such as poverty and injustice.[104] Ambedkar considered the Four Noble truths as a later monkish accretion. He did not find hope and joy in the third and fourth noble truths, which speak of the cessation of suffering in a state of inner peace and the path to its cessation, involving both ethical and spiritual practices. He also thought that Buddhist monks are for the purpose of self-culture and social service.[105]

3. Buddhist doctrine as the basis for morality

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[102] Christopher S. Queen, "Ambedkar's Dhamma: Source and Method in the Construction of Engaged Buddhism," in *Reconstructing the world: B.R. Ambedkar and Buddhism in India*, ed. Surendra Jondhale and Johannes Beltz (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 137, 138.
[103] Queen, 138.
[104] Ibid., 140.
[105] Ibid., 139.

In theistic religions, morality is considered in terms of reward and punishment given by God to individuals. Atheistic religion justified morality in terms of the karmic doctrine, which defines the good or bad consequences according to good or bad actions, respectively.[106]

Ambedkar justified Buddhist morality as an universalistic consequentialism autonomously, which is devoid of any external consideration, including transcendental religious belief. General speaking, Ambedkar considered theistic religion as the blocking stones of morality and rationality, because they only built a God-man relationship and undermined the social relations among men. In his perspective, the Buddha defined religion as a way to create a kingdom of righteousness in the world. Also, since morality is essentially social, Ambedkar excluded in his model the individualistic, spiritualistic aspect of Buddhism, especially the aspect of meditation.[107] Ambedkar also defined morality as sacred, because it is universal and cannot be violated.[108]

With the rationalist, humanist, and down-to-earth approaches, Ambedkar emphasized morality, the root of Buddhism that replaces god, soul, prayers, worship, rituals, ceremonies, sacrifices, and others in religious elements.[109]

B. Others' critics of his Buddhist approach

Many contemporary scholars, including Buddhists and Neo-Hindu, may not accept these approaches of Ambedkar.[110] For instance, Jivaka, a scholar, gave a comment about Ambedkar's

[106] Gokhale, 125.
[107] Ibid., 125, 126.
[108] Ibid., 129.
[109] Kadam, 47.
[110] Gokhale, 128.

book *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, that Ambedkar's Buddhism was based on Hate, the Buddha's on Compassion.[111]

C. Buddhist influence and transformation of the untouchable people

In comparison to many other approaches that might be taken to fixing the untouchables' problems, Buddhism's strong suit is mental discipline, the intentional replacement of unwholesome and unskillful states such as hopelessness, defeatism, self-loathing, anxiety, and depression, with wholesome and skillful states, such as effort, determination, inner peace, and clarity. With a new attitude, the former untouchables may progress in their material life. Otherwise, it is impossible.[112] According to some research scholars, the former untouchables who have embraced Buddhism have obtained worthy gains. They have got rid of their inferiority complex. They have a fresh sense of identity and a newly acquired confidence. Their young people have completely shed the old superstitions that had oppressed their existence and have adopted a more positive view of life. A new cultural and social renaissance has transformed Buddhist youth. They no longer believe in pre-ordained fate or in any of the ancient rituals. They only believe in hard work, education and a rational approach can bring progress. Their attitude seems to be firm, progressive, and scientific compared to high-caste Hindu youth.[113]

Chapter Five. Conclusion

After a thorough examination of Ambedkar's life, political and social activities, and his views of religious and secular paths to liberate the untouchable people, I come to the conclusion that Ambedkar turned to Buddhism as a liberated path due to its doctrines of equality, liberty,

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[111] Queen, 139, 141.
[112] Sallie B. King, *Socially engaged Buddhism* (USA: University of Hawai'I Press, 2009), 147.
[113] Ahir, 13, 14.

and fraternity for his untouchable people after his failure in politics. Evidently, he said that "I have derived my philosophy from religion of the Buddha in liberty, equality, and fraternity, not from political science."[114] Because of his conversion to Buddhism, millions of untouchable people have followed his example to become Buddhists, who are enjoying their life as the freemen in their Hindu country. Future research may need to determine how much these followers of Ambedkar enjoy their life or encounter difficulty as Buddhists, who comprise only a small percentage of population in a Hindu country.

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[114] Naik, 283.

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